



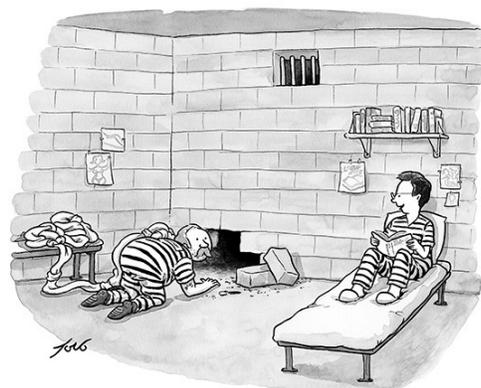
Proper 6, The Second Sunday after Pentecost  
Rev. Jonathan Stepp  
June 14, 2020

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

We begin this morning, as always, with our weekly dose of Sunday humor.



*"Thank you so much for coming."*



*"No, thanks. Reading is my escape."*



m.e.menain

I'm mindful on this Second Sunday after Pentecost of an important anniversary that will be celebrated this coming Friday, June 19<sup>th</sup>. This Friday is the annual celebration of an important event in American history that took place on June 19, 1865. That was the day that Union Army General Gordon Granger announced the Emancipation Proclamation in the state of Texas, thus informing the enslaved people of that state that they had been set free.

Every year since then, Friday, June 19<sup>th</sup>, has been commemorated as a holiday called "Juneteenth" - a celebration of the day when word of the end of slavery had finally reached every state in the United States. Part of what's interesting about that first Juneteenth is the fact that most people in Texas were unaware of the Emancipation until they heard it proclaimed by the U.S. Army, even though Abraham Lincoln had issued the Proclamation two and half years earlier in 1863. They were unaware because up until that day Texas had been in a state of rebellion against the federal government and, in an age of slow travel by train and horse, word had not reached that far west.

So, technically, the enslaved people of Texas had been legally free for over two years but they hadn't been able to live in that freedom because they didn't know they were free because no one had told them and no one with the power to enforce their freedom was on hand to make it happen until June 19<sup>th</sup> 1865.

On that first Juneteenth, I would imagine the enslaved people of Texas felt a little bit like Sarah in our story today from the Hebrew scriptures. After having lived a very long life without having children, and being well past child bearing age, she laughed in disbelief when the Lord said that she would have a son. There are some things in life that we long for, hope for, and eventually give up hope for. I would imagine there were many enslaved people in Texas who had given up of hope of ever being free, especially after they saw the state of Texas commit treason against the United States and go into a bloody and protracted war in an effort to keep them enslaved. I would imagine there was a lot of laughter that first Juneteenth in 1865 – laughter of joy and, perhaps, disbelief.

I see an analogy between Juneteenth and the gospel of Christ. As we discussed last week, the good news of Jesus is the good news of our adoption into the Triune Life of God through Jesus. We live and move and have our being within God and God lives within us. Our adoption into God's life sets us free from sin and the fear of death. It sets us free to be who God created us to be. But like the enslaved people of Texas, it doesn't do us much good to have been set free unless we know and believe that we have been set free. If no one tells us that we are freed children of God then are likely to go right on living as though we are still enslaved to sin and death.

That's where our gospel reading comes in. What message does Jesus entrust to the twelve apostles? He tells them to “go, proclaim the good news, ‘The kingdom of heaven has come near.’” That's an emancipation proclamation. It's not an announcement of something that can be true if those who hear it will live the right way and follow the right rules. It's an announcement like the proclamation on Juneteenth in 1865: it's an announcement of something that is already true, something already accomplished, and it is an invitation to believe the truth established in the life, death, and resurrection of Christ.

This commissioning of the twelve apostles that we've seen this morning is a message to us about our lives. First of all, it is a message to us that God has come near to us. First of all we are called to believe the truth that God is as near to us as our own breath, our own heartbeat, our own souls. And secondly, it is a commissioning for us to follow in the footsteps of the apostles and do as they did: share this good news with oth-

ers, the good news that something has changed in the world, that God has proclaimed emancipation, and that we are all included in this new world that God is creating.

It's a message that our world needs to hear as surely and desperately as the enslaved people of Texas needed to hear the message of their emancipation all those years ago. The world needs to know that they are already included in God's life and they need us bear witness to that message in any way that we can: in word, in prayer, and in deeds of kindness and caring.

May Christ empower us, as he empowered those first apostles, to go and proclaim by word and deed the good news of humanity's freedom in God's love.

Amen.